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Combing and Curling: *Orator Summus Plato*[1]

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The title of this talk may recall the subjects taught in the school attended by the Mock Turtle in *Alice in Wonderland*: reeling and writhing and fainting in coils, but actually the first part (combing and curling) comes from quite a well-known passage in the treatise by the Greek critic, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *On Composition*, and the second from Cicero, in *De Oratore*.

Dionysius was one of that influential group of Greek men of letters—teachers of rhetoric, literary critics—who settled in Rome in the age of Augustus and provided guidance in the advanced study of Greek literature for rich and cultivated Romans, often men with political ambitions. Most of them regarded Demosthenes as the supreme master of oratorical style: They found in him the ultimate exemplar of what they called *deinotēs* (awe-inspiring intensity)—ever the most admired trait in oratory of the grand style. But they discussed and analyzed in minute detail passages from many other authors as well, and one of them was Plato. In Chapter 25 of the treatise *On Composition* Dionysius comments on the tremendous care that Plato devoted to securing the most effective arrangement of words. Even at the age of 80 he was still "combing and curling his dialogues and braiding them in every way" (τοὺς ἑαυτοῦ διαλόγους κτενίζων καὶ βοστρυχίζων καὶ πάντα τρόπον ἀναπλέκων).

There follows the famous story about the notebook found among Plato's effects when he died: It contained many different arrangements of the first sentence of the *Republic*. It is not certain whether it was only the first eight words (κατέβην χθὲς εἰς Πειραιᾶ μετὰ Γλαύκωνος τοῦ Ἀρίστωνος) that Plato kept combing and curling, or the whole sentence (up to νῦν πρῶτον ἄγοντες). Quintilian, who also knows the story, seems to imply that it was only the first four words (κατέβην χθὲς εἰς Πειραιᾶ, 8. 6. 64), which would be even more remarkable. Both ancient and modern critics have been fascinated by what Dionysius rightly calls Plato's *philoponia* (love of labor) in reworking this passage. Demetrius, perhaps a

[1] Apart from supplying references, I have made only minimal changes in this lecture, which I had the honor of delivering on March 22, 1989 at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, as part of a memorial to Friedrich Solmsen, revered teacher and friend for more than forty years.

contemporary of Dionysius, in his treatise *On Style* (c. 21) analyzes the entire sentence (as far as ἄγοντες) and comments on the studied ease and relaxation of the period that he finds there, while J. D. Denniston, in *Greek Prose Style*, provides an enlightening discussion of the first eight words, suggesting some of the reasons for their extraordinary felicity. ("The effect may seem due to accident"—he says—"but such accidents do not befall inferior writers.")[2]

I chose the quotation from Dionysius to emphasize an aspect of Plato's achievement that exerted tremendous influence in antiquity, yet has received comparatively little notice in our own time, compared, that is, with the amount of attention devoted by modern scholarship to his dialectic, his theory of Forms, his concept of love, of the ideal state, of education, and so on. I mean his rhetoric. The scrupulous, unremitting attention to word-placement, which caught the attention of Dionysius, is but one result of Plato's upbringing in the Athenian world of the last quarter of the fifth century, dominated intellectually by the Sophists and incurably infected by sophistic rhetoric. The ancient critics recognized Plato as a product of this revolutionary movement, and this is why Cicero says in *De Oratore* that, in spite of making fun of the orators, Plato seemed himself to be the *orator summus*, the consummate orator (1. 47): *in oratoribus irridendis ipse esse orator summus videbatur*.

To be sure, one phase of Plato's relation to rhetoric has always received more than adequate attention (as it does in the passage from Cicero just quoted): his hostility, most systematically and fully expressed in the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus*, but prominent in many other dialogues as well, from the *Apology* with its ostentatious rejection of the sophistic kind of *deinotēs*, through the *Menexenus*, that devastating parody of the standard funeral oration, and the *Symposium*, with its merciless imitation of Agathon's Gorgianic style, to the *Theaetetus*, which contains a vivid contrast between the forensic advocate and the philosopher, highly derogatory, of course, to the advocate.

The reasons for Plato's opposition to sophistic rhetoric are too well known and often rehearsed to warrant extensive analysis here.[3] Let me just recall that it was not only the perverse influence wielded by rhetoric on both politics and the ethics of the individual that aroused Plato's hostility. Even more basic was the fact that sophistic rhetoric took the side of appearance in the conflict between appearance and reality that lay behind much of the Socratic–Platonic philosophy. Rhetoric, as it was developed in the late fifth century and practiced in the early fourth, was concerned, not with knowledge, but with the appearance of knowledge. It did not care for truth,

[2] *Greek Prose Style* (Oxford 1952) 41.

[3] This subject is discussed at greater length in North, "Swimming Upside Down in the Wrong Direction: Plato's Criticism of Sophistic Rhetoric on Technical and Stylistic Grounds," *Traditio* 32 (1976) 11–29. I quote from pp. 11–12 in slightly altered form.

only for what was probable or persuasive. To seem, rather than to be, was its goal. This indifference to truth for its own sake led sophistic rhetoric to a position of neutrality about moral values. It sought to please and gratify its audience, with a view to winning victories and scoring points, not to arrive at an understanding of the Good, certainly not to leave its hearers better than it found them. Success and power constituted the goal of sophistic rhetoric; these were, after all, the reasons why students flocked to the Sophists in the first place. As a consequence of these two characteristics—being indifferent to truth and aiming at gratification—yet a third grievous flaw emerged: Rhetoric used modes of persuasion repugnant to the philosopher, appealing to the emotions rather than to the intellect. Hence Plato was bound to oppose it on the same grounds as imitative poetry in the *Republic*: It encouraged the domination of the lower faculties of the soul over the higher. Such poetry is in fact a form of rhetoric addressed to a mob, Plato tells us in the *Republic* (604e5). Hence both poetry and rhetoric invite the same condemnation, and for the same reasons.

The arguments against sophistic rhetoric are set forth at greatest length in the *Gorgias*, and it is fascinating to see how long they survived, supplying the ammunition used by philosophers in the intermittent warfare against rhetoric that broke out with new vehemence when the Romans appeared on the horizon—those rich and powerful barbarians, eager to be hellenized in certain limited ways, and willing to pay for the process. The rhetoricians of course devised counter-arguments, which were in their turn canonized. We may estimate the seriousness with which Plato's polemic continued to be taken nearly five centuries after the *Gorgias* by the zeal with which Aelius Aristides, a representative of the Second Sophistic, responded to the Platonic attack in two long treatises written close to the middle of the second century of our era. One treatise was a defence of rhetoric itself, the other a defence of the four statesmen whom Plato had denounced in the *Gorgias* for leaving Athens worse than they had found her. Yet at the conclusion of the first treatise, Aristides admits that Plato is the father and teacher of orators,[4] and it is the positive aspect of Plato's love–hate relation to rhetoric that I wish to pursue, not the negative.

The mention of Gorgias, the greatest of the sophistic rhetoricians of the first generation, reminds me that by a curious coincidence Plato was born (according to the best tradition) in the very year in which Gorgias paid his first, famous visit to Athens, 428/7 B.C. If the two events did indeed coincide, it follows that the most vigorous and effective enemy of sophistic rhetoric embarked on what was to be a long lifetime (Plato lived to be 80) just as the greatest champion of that rhetoric, already half-way through an even longer life (108 years), appeared on the scene of some of his most glittering triumphs.

[4] Aristides 2. 465 Behr. For the dates of the two *Defences* consult C. A. Behr, *P. Aelius Aristides. The Complete Works* I (Leiden 1986) 449, 460.

The impact of Gorgias, Protagoras, and the rest of that first group of Sophists on Athenian intellectual, political, and cultural life in the next two decades is fully documented in the literature of the period. It would have been quite impossible for Plato to escape exposure to the technical devices introduced or popularized by the Sophists (any more than their moral and political views), and his *Dialogues* are full of evidence that he did not, in fact, escape. We know very little about Plato's education. Neither the *Dialogues* nor the *Epistles* contain direct references to his schooling. The names of his music teacher, his wrestling teacher, and the man who taught him grammar survive in various anecdotes,[5] but there is never a word about any training in rhetoric. We know, of course, Plato's social position in Athens, and we can guess what opportunities he would have had. His father, who traced his descent from the mythical kings of Athens, died when Plato was a child, and his mother (a descendant of Solon) married as her second husband a man who was a close friend and supporter of Pericles. (He was, in fact, the father of Demos, said to be the *erōmenos* of Callicles in the *Gorgias*.) A boy of Plato's connections would have heard and seen, at close range, whatever went on in Athenian political life in the turbulent years that followed the Sicilian disaster of 415: the fall of the democracy, the rise and fall of the Four Hundred and then the Thirty Tyrants, the trial of Antiphon, the overthrow of Theramenes, the return and second departure of Alcibiades. During these formative years Plato obviously absorbed the rhetorical techniques that were being adapted, not only to the needs of the lawcourts and the public assemblies, but also to those of the tragic and comic theatre. His friendship with Socrates would have given his life a specific orientation; it would not have wiped out what he had observed all about him during the years when he was growing up. So it is only to be expected that the *Dialogues* are richly, endlessly rhetorical, owing so much of their form to the strategies perfected by the Sophists that it may even be said that without rhetoric there would have been no *Dialogues* as we know them, no Plato, in fact—certainly no Platonic Socrates.

Let us consider a few of the ways in which Plato is revealed as the heir of sophistic rhetoric. First and most obvious is his extensive use of formal orations in the *Dialogues*. Plato is in fact a logographer (a writer of speeches for others to deliver) of the first rank. For variety, range, mastery of all the available means of persuasion (in Aristotelian terms *ēthos*, *pathos*, *logos*) he has no equal. It is, from one point of view, a pity that he was deflected from his early ambition to be a statesman, because an orator greater than Pericles may have been lost when Plato turned away from active politics and took shelter under that famous wall (*Rep.* 6, 496).

What is probably the single, best-known dialogue of Plato is not a dialogue at all, but a pseudo-forensic oration, the *Apology of Socrates*.

[5] See Alice Swift Riginos, *Platonica: The Anecdotes Concerning the Life and Writings of Plato* (Leiden 1976) 39–51.

Realizing as we must that there is no compelling proof that Socrates made any speech whatsoever at his trial, and that if he made a speech there is no reason to believe it was anything like this, we should recognize the strong pressures that led Plato to choose precisely this form for his vindication, not so much of Socrates, as of the philosophic life. The tension between the familiar form of the courtroom oration, well known to us from the Attic orators, and the substance that Plato embodies in this form is so dynamic as to make the *Apology* the most successful, as it is the most thorough, of all his adaptations of rhetorical forms. But other dialogues are almost as profoundly indebted. The *Menexenus* and the *Symposium*, in their very different ways, both depend on Plato's sovereign mastery of the form and the topics of, respectively, the funeral oration and the encomium, just as the *Phaedrus* is what it is because Plato can manipulate the paradoxical encomium with the most dazzling virtuosity.

Some readers, I suspect, fail to notice how skillfully Plato exploits the possibilities of formal oratory within a dialogue. No one, to be sure, is likely to miss the way he focuses attention on the series of speeches in the *Symposium*, adapts each speech to the speaker, organizes the whole set in irreversible order, and relates them to the dominant image of the ladder, culminating apparently in the speech of Diotima, but actually in that of Alcibiades. Yet in the *Gorgias*, for example, Plato leads so unobtrusively into the great speech of Callicles in praise of the life of ruthless ambition that few, I imagine, think of it in terms of oratory. (Certainly few modern commentators do justice to its rhetorical skill.)[6] But from the very start Plato gives us clues to what he is doing, as Callicles begins with an accusation typical of rejoinders in the Assembly, a charge that his opponent is babbling like a demagogue. The eloquence of his argument for the rule of the strong is due in large measure to his employment of time-honored rhetorical devices: quotations and interpretations of poetry, rhetorical questions, and a great variety of figures, including parallel structure, climax, and polysyndeton. The sentence about the revolt of the man who is by nature strong (484a) is especially instructive in its deployment of such devices, and it was this passage, E. R. Dodds suggests,[7] that inspired Nietzsche.

An instance of even more unobtrusive borrowing from the techniques of the courtroom occurs at the outset of *Republic* 5, where Plato introduces Socrates' discussion of the community of wives with what amounts to the standard topics of the proem, split between Glaucon and Socrates in such a way that the resemblance to oratory is disguised, yet the devices for arousing interest, disclaiming expert knowledge, and winning favor are all effectively manipulated (449d–51c). The adaptation of oratorical conventions to the dialogue-form was one of Plato's most brilliant discoveries, especially

[6] But E. R. Dodds, *Plato. Gorgias* (Oxford 1959) 267, comments on the "superb rhetorical vigour" of 483c7–84c3.

[7] Dodds (previous note) 389

evident in the *Gorgias*, *Republic*, *Symposium*, and *Phaedrus*. Whenever realistic dialogue is abandoned, rhetorical elements make an entirely different contribution, as can be seen in the last of Plato's works.

The *Laws* resorts unashamed to the manner of a treatise, and at moments of heightened intensity needs a change of pace, which is regularly secured through the introduction of oratory or oratorical devices. But even here the use of oratory has a function much more organic than mere stylistic variation. The Address to the Settlers in the new city to be founded on Crete (715e–18c) is a case in point. It constitutes a model of the persuasive proem that the Athenian Stranger (who replaces Socrates in this final dialogue) recommends for all the important laws of the new *politeia*. The ideal situation (he says) would be one in which the citizens would be extremely easy to persuade in the direction of virtue (718c), and the proem to any legal code should help make them more docile and well-disposed (723a, cf. 718d). These, of course, are the traditional functions of the proem according to standard rhetorical doctrine.[8] The Stranger gives examples of legislation that merely states the law and specifies the penalty, and the same legislation when equipped with a persuasive proem, and then goes on to formulate a long and elaborate proem to the entire legal code, while admitting that everything that has been said up to this point (Books 1, 2, and 3) has in fact been a kind of gigantic proem. The Address to the Settlers itself is essentially a homily, dealing with the most lofty subjects (the nature of God, the relation of man to God, the political consequences of piety and impiety), and it accurately forecasts the religious context of the ideal state.

But beyond the obvious use of formal oratory of various types, Plato's dialogues abound in rhetorical techniques that enrich and give form to the expression of his thought. Consider his mastery of *ēthos*, *pathos*, and *logos*, the three Aristotelian modes of persuasion that I have already mentioned. *Logos* (argumentation) we may take for granted in the development of the dialogue form, but the other two are deployed in ways that now seem obvious only because we are so familiar with what Plato achieves by their use. *Ethos* (characterization) and *pathos* (emotional appeal) are ideally combined in the persona of Socrates, nowhere more effectively than in the *Apology*, where in a heightened manner they perform the functions that *ēthos* and *pathos* normally do in any courtroom speech for the defence. But these essentially rhetorical methods of gaining assent continue to appear in non-oratorical contexts. The very existence of the Socrates who has dominated the history of ethics testifies to the rhetorical genius of Plato, for the *ēthos* established in the *Apology*, the *Crito*, and the *Phaedo* is responsible for the *pathos* that so moves us in these works and directs our response to the drama of Socrates' death.

[8] Consult H. Caplan on the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 1. 4. 6 for the history of this doctrine both before and after Aristotle. See also Quintilian 4. 1. 5.

Neither *ēthos* nor *pathos* was invented by the rhetoricians, to be sure, but it was they who systematized what had long been practiced in poetry and was now being refined and defined for the benefit of the orators. We know that Thrasymachus, the rhetor who speaks so forcefully in Book 1 of the *Republic*, worked out ways of appealing to the emotions, especially pity,[9] and while we cannot so easily identify the one who took the first steps in establishing the doctrine of *ēthos*, we need not doubt that the subject was discussed among professionals. Aristotle tells us as much in the *Rhetoric*, when he responds both to those who denied that *ēthos* was of any importance to the orator, and to those who thought it was indeed important but could best be secured by means outside the speech itself (1. 2. 4–7, 1356a1–27). Aristotle's own requirement (that *ēthos* develop within the oration) would have been more than adequately satisfied by the procedure used in the *Apology*. There Plato's achievement is particularly worth studying because of the ambiguity of his task, an ambiguity derived from his twofold audience, the members of the jury supposedly being addressed by Socrates and the readers of the *Apology* from that day to this. Because of the historical fact that Socrates was condemned to death, Plato was obliged to design a speech that would make this outcome comprehensible. Hence the apparent arrogance evinced by Socrates at certain points in his defence, an attitude that would inevitably have antagonized a jury (as it does many undergraduates to this day). Because Plato was using the trial to demonstrate the supreme value of the philosophical life, the speech had to reveal a character that would win the admiration of thoughtful readers. It is the readers who really matter, and the *ēthos* of the Platonic Socrates demonstrated in this speech is designed for its effect on them.[10]

Another obvious debt is related to oratorical structure. The sophistic rhetors usually organized their teaching around the concept of the "parts of the oration," and while this approach ultimately proved less satisfactory than the Peripatetic focus on the functions of the orator (known in Latin as the *officia oratoris*)—invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery—it did provide the novice speaker with specific, detailed guidance in shaping his proem and his epilogue and all that stretched between. Plato was thoroughly familiar with the stereotypes, and he uses them with consummate skill, as when at the beginning of the *Apology* he simultaneously derides and exploits the cliché about being inexperienced in speaking, most overworked of all the topics of the proem. Adapting this cliché, he makes Socrates protest his inexperience in the courtroom and at

[9] Cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 267c–d.

[10] For a comparison to the challenge faced by Euripides, when he wrote Hippolytus' speech in his own defence before Theseus, see North, "Socrates Deinos Legein," in *Language and the Tragic Hero: Essays on Greek Tragedy in Honor of Gordon M. Kirkwood*, ed. P. Pucci (Atlanta 1988) 121–30. The portrayal of Socrates as the philosophic hero is analyzed by E. Wolff, *Platons Apologie* (Berlin 1929). See also R. L. Fowler, "The Rhetoric of Desperation," *HSCP* 91 (1987) 5–38.

the same time redefine the supreme oratorical quality of *deinotēs* as "to speak the truth" (17a). The reader follows the paradoxical development of this definition throughout the speech and ultimately realizes that under the guise of the well-worn assertion of *apeiria* (inexperience) Plato has served notice that his Socrates both rejects the values common to the Athenians and gives a new meaning to their accepted vocabulary.

Still another example of Plato's exploitation of familiar sophistic techniques appears in the speech assigned to Agathon in the *Symposium*, where the Gorgianic style of the speaker is parodied and the topic of the cardinal virtues as the basis of encomium is treated in a perverse and sophistic manner.[11] In both ways—by the parody of sophistic style and by the exposure of sophistic thinking—he reveals Agathon's eulogy of Eros to be seriously flawed.

Most of what I have said so far applies to the dialogues in which long, connected speeches play a prominent part. But Plato's debt to rhetoric is equally pervasive, if less immediately obvious, in the non-oratorical dialogues. It would probably go too far to claim that Plato owes to rhetoric the very texture of his style, for Plato's style draws upon many sources—Ionian philosophy and poetry to name two that stand out—yet much of what makes his dialogues memorable, much of what enables his thought to find persuasive expression, springs from the devices, the figures, the elements of style worked out by sophistic rhetoricians. The figures that we associate with Gorgias (antithesis, isocolon, parison, homoeoteleuton) were not, of course, invented by him; every one of them can be identified in pre-Gorgianic prose, and before that in poetry. But Gorgias refined and systematized the figures and inspired his students, such as Polus and Antisthenes, to write treatises "On Style," which carried into the second generation of sophistic rhetoricians the interest in elegance of diction and figurative language that constitutes an enduring legacy of rhetoric to the development of Greek prose.

Plato by no means confines himself to the Gorgianic figures, although it is amusing to see how frequently he is reproached by ancient critics for excessive Gorgianisms. His ability to mould a style capable of conveying a vast range of ideas (a style that with equal effectiveness encompasses all the gradations from the plain to the grand—and there are many more than three gradations) and his ability to fit the style both to the speaker in a given dialogue and to the subject under discussion, these twin abilities derive from his mastery of a multitude of rhetorical devices (figures of thought and figures of diction), his penetration into the mysteries of *ēthos* and *pathos*, and ultimately his sure grasp of the principle of the *prepon* (what is appropriate). This basic *virtus dicendi* enabled him to organize and adorn in the most effective way what his powers of *inventio* had produced.

[11] For a more detailed analysis of Agathon's speech as a parody of Gorgias, see North (above, note 3) 19–20.

One way to test this statement is to read the *Phaedrus*, both for its doctrine and for the way that doctrine is expressed. What I have in mind, very briefly, is (1) the emphasis on the *prepon* and its synonyms in Socrates' criticism of Lysias' speech as lacking in *anankē logographikē* (264b), a term immediately explicated as the organization of a discourse like a living thing, whose middle and extremities are suited to one another (πρέποντα ἀλλήλοις), (2) his praise of his own two speeches as demonstrating the principle of definition, which leads to clarity and self-consistency (τὸ αὐτὸ αὐτῷ ὁμολογούμενον 265d), (3) his comparison of a genuine art of rhetoric to the genuine art of tragedy, which consists of the appropriate integration (πρέπουσαν σύστασιν) of dramatic speeches so that they are in harmony (συνισταμένην) with one another and with the whole (268d), (4) his insistence that one who practices the truly rhetorical and persuasive art must adapt speeches to souls out of a knowledge of which arguments will be persuasive to which souls (271b), (5) his comprehensive recapitulation in which he requires a recognition of the *kairos*, the appropriate moment for speech or silence, for one kind of speech or another, and finally (6) his consideration of *euprepeia* and *aprepeia* in writing, as well as in speaking (274b). These passages demonstrate Plato's exquisite sensitivity to the *prepon* as a fundamental principle of discourse. The doctrine is present throughout the *Phaedrus*, not merely as a theory emphasized in the rhetorical section, but as the underlying justification for the variety of styles employed in the earlier, dramatic and mythological parts.

If I may turn from style to a particular topic closely identified with rhetoric in its political context—one that justifies the Sophists' concern for the techniques of deliberative, as well as forensic and epideictic oratory—let me mention the orator–statesman, normally called a *rhētor* in Athenian usage,[12] but for Plato more often a *politikos*. Plato's attitude toward this figure, while consistently hostile, shows variations related to the dominant interest of specific dialogues.

As is well known, the *Apology* reflects the conviction that the philosopher, not the orator–statesman, is the true benefactor of the *polis*. According to Socrates, no just man can survive if he enters politics; he who fights for the right must do so in private, not in public (31c). Socrates himself, the self-proclaimed gadfly of Athens, has been prevented from taking part in public life by his *daimonion*, the mysterious sign, internal yet somehow divine, that warns him against certain actions, and he has therefore accepted the paradoxical position of being at once *apragmōn*, one who minds his own business, a non-meddler, and *polypragmōn*, one who meddles in other people's business, performing the greatest service to the state, but always as a private citizen (31d–32a).[13] Socrates' method of

[12] See M. H. Hansen, "The Athenian 'Politicians' 403–322 B.C.," *GRBS* 24 (1983) 33–55 for the customary terminology, and *The Athenian Assembly* (Oxford 1987) 49–69.

[13] On this paradox see L. B. Carter, *The Quiet Athenian* (Oxford 1986) 183–86.

dialectical refutation, the *elenchus* (not the statesman's oratorical *deinotēs*) is what truly advances the welfare of the citizens.

The same attitude is developed at much greater length in the *Gorgias*, but it can also be detected in certain shorter dialogues, which are not primarily interested in the position of the orator–statesman, but comment tangentially on this topic. In the *Euthydemus*, for example, we find Socrates debating with two teachers of eristic, and in the course of the conversation sharply distinguishing the object of politics from the object of philosophy (306a–b). He also briefly considers whether to subsume the art of speech-making under the art of politics (290b–91d), and observes that neither of these arts can make us happy. The *Meno* criticizes four celebrated Athenian statesmen for failing to teach their sons the excellence that they themselves possessed (93c–94b). In the *Gorgias* this charge is extended to include the failure to instruct all the citizens. When Callicles praises the great statesmen of the past for having employed a noble kind of rhetoric, Socrates retorts that they failed in the primary task of the noble rhetor, to instil virtue. Not only their own sons, as in the *Meno*, but all the citizens have thus been neglected, because they have been flattered by the orators instead of being corrected and told the truth. And now Socrates, who earlier in the *Gorgias* had reaffirmed the distinction between what the *politikoi* do and what he does, saying explicitly, "I am not one of the *politikoi*" (473e), startles us by saying, "I think that I am one of the few persons in Athens (not to say the only one) who attempt the art of politics, and alone of men living today, I attend to political affairs" (521d). Socrates is able to make this statement because he now admits the theoretical possibility of a noble art of rhetoric, in contrast to the debased kind used by the Athenian rhetors, and the *politikos* who will use the noble rhetoric can be identified with the philosopher, who aims to make the citizens as good as possible, saying what is best, whether pleasant or the reverse (502e, 503a).

How such a noble rhetoric would actually operate the *Gorgias* does not reveal, nor does the *Republic* take us much farther, since although the philosopher and the ruler are now identified, the resulting paragon is not called a *politikos*, much less a *rhētor*, and under the conditions postulated for the ideal state the philosopher–king has little need of oratory to convince the citizens that they should adopt any given legislative proposal. The *Republic* shows no interest in legislation or constitutional procedures. The philosopher–kings are accepted by those they rule because of their expert knowledge, attained through the long process of education that culminates in dialectic and knowledge of the Forms. By a combination of *peithō* (persuasion) and *anankē* (compulsion) they harmonize the citizens and contrive to make each one do his own work for the good of the whole (519b–20a), but we learn very little about the actual means of persuasion (or of *anankē*, for that matter).

An entirely different situation obtains in Plato's final work, the *Laws*, which not only accepts the need for legislation to achieve the best *politeia*

compatible with human weakness, but devotes serious attention to persuasion as an instrument of the ruler. Two earlier dialogues, the *Phaedrus* and the *Politikos*, help us to understand Plato's attitude in this final treatment of the role of rhetoric in the state. The *Phaedrus* develops the hint of the *Gorgias* about a philosophical art of rhetoric, illustrating it by the accomplishment of Pericles under the guidance of Anaxagoras (269e), and extends the scope of this rhetoric to include private and written *logoi*, as well as spoken oratory, specifically mentioning written laws (278c).

The *Politikos* revives the suggestion made in the *Euthydemus* about a political art that would know how to make use of the results of other arts, such as speech-making and generalship. Now the statesman whose nature and functions are discussed in the *Politikos* will make use of expert advice in fields that he himself need not master. A kind of rhetoric called by the novel term *rhētoreia*—perhaps invented by Plato to avoid the invidious implications of *rhētorikē*—shares in the ruler's art (304a). The task of the statesman is to decide whether persuasion or compulsion or neither is to be employed. The task of *rhētoreia*, once that decision has been made, is to render persuasive what is just. It will persuade the general mass of the population by telling them stories (*mythologia*), rather than by imparting instruction (*didachē*, 304d). Before we conclude that *mythologia* necessarily conveys a contemptuous connotation, we should ponder Plato's own uses of myth and the relation of myth to *didachē* (or apodeictic) in such dialogues as the *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, or *Timaeus*.

The *Laws* permits us to see *rhētoreia* functioning in the service of the state. The official responsible for exercising persuasion is now called a *nomothetēs* (legislator), never a *rhētor*, and there are remarkably few references to any related word, even *rhētorikos*, in the *Laws*, but a great many to *peithō* and *peithein*, which are regularly coupled with words that mean to teach—*didaskein*, *paideuein*, and the like. The uses of persuasion in the *Laws* are so many and varied as to defy enumeration in a brief survey,[14] but they clearly demonstrate Plato's strong, continuing interest in the relation of rhetoric to statesmanship and his originality in adapting various rhetorical techniques to the needs of the Cretan city. I have mentioned the use of persuasive proems to the laws. A law not so equipped is referred to as a *nomos akratos* (unmixed law), which constitutes a tyrannical imposition, relying only on coercion (723a). Another rhetorical technique employs praise and blame, the matter of traditional epideictic, as a mode of education, used in connection with games and festivals and governed by strict rules determining not only who is worthy to receive praise, but who is eligible to bestow it. What Plato calls παρρησία ἐν Μούσαις (freedom of speech amid the Muses) turns out to be important for the Cretan city (829c).

[14] Consult G. Morrow, *Plato's Cretan City* (Princeton 1960) 552–60, and "Plato's Concept of Persuasion," *Philosophical Review* 62 (1953) 234–50.

One measure of the difference between the *Republic* and the *Laws* may be seen in the different ways the two states come into being. In the *Republic* philosophers become kings, and the philosophers are such by virtue of their mastery of dialectic. In the *Laws* the ideal city could come into existence under two conditions: first, if there should be a young tyrant possessed of certain qualifications (youth, self-control, a good memory, courage, a noble nature, and—best of all—good luck), and secondly, if this young ruler should find a great lawgiver to give him advice (709e–10b). The qualifications of the lawgiver in turn are summed up by comparison to a mythical exemplar—Nestor, the honey-tongued orator of the *Iliad*, who excelled all other men in the power of speech and in *sōphrosynē* (711e). The element of *aretē* retains the same importance it has always had in Plato's political thought, but dialectical ability has now made room for rhetoric. /

It is time to turn to the other, perhaps less familiar, half of our subject: Plato's influence on rhetoric, not his debt, but his legacy. Once again, I shall omit the negative side, the way in which Plato's anti-rhetorical arguments continued to be used, adapted, and elaborated by the Hellenistic philosophical schools, by the enemies of rhetoric in Rome, and by opponents in even later times, who repeated Plato's charges that rhetoric was morally and artistically indefensible and that it harmed both the state and the rhetorician himself.[15] Let me instead mention some of the positive effects that Plato had on rhetoric and oratory, prose-writing in general, and literary criticism in particular.

It is, I think, widely accepted that the *Rhetoric* of Aristotle develops certain notions sketched in the *Phaedrus*, the dialogue in which Plato at last lays the foundation for a rhetoric acceptable according to his standards, as sophistic rhetoric had not been. Friedrich Solmsen many years ago set forth the main lines of this argument, especially with respect to the systematic treatment of emotional appeals. I can do no better than to quote from his influential article in *Classical Philology* in 1938 ("Aristotle and Cicero on the Orator's Playing upon the Feelings"), where an Appendix on the *Phaedrus* and the *Rhetoric* sums up the evidence for Aristotle's indebtedness to Plato:

> In both works rhetoric is based on dialectic, σαφήνεια is regarded as the most essential requirement of the diction, and a demand for the intrinsic unity of the λόγος is put forward and illustrated by a comparison with the organic unity of an animal's body. Add to this the description in both of rhetoric as dialectical demonstration plus ψυχαγωγία, the polemical attitude in both works toward the vulgar rhetoricians with their systems of τὰ μόρια τοῦ λόγου, and the fact

[15] The continued use of the second of these arguments is discussed by North, "*Inutilis sibi, perniciosus patriae*," *ICS* 6 (1981) 242–71.

that tradition . . . has it that Aristotle's rhetorical μέθοδος originated in the Academy. (pp. 229–30)

The persistence of Plato's influence may be seen in other ways as well. One that had far-reaching importance was the hierarchy of values that he established, by which the ἀγαθὰ τῆς ψυχῆς, the "goods of the soul," took priority, followed by those of the body and then by the external advantages (wealth, friends). This doctrine, already prominent in the *Apology* (36b–c), where it justifies Socrates' claim that he is the only true statesman, exercised its most far-reaching influence on ethical and political philosophy, but it had an impact on rhetoric also, because it helped to establish the topic of *aretē* as the essential subject for epideictic oratory, the oratory of praise and blame. Nothing was more characteristic of the Platonic–Aristotelian (as distinguished from the sophistic–Isocratean) strain in ancient epideictic than the insistence that praise is due only to *aretē*, not to the other so-called goods that people sought or boasted.[16]

Moreover, in the very definition of virtue and its various categories, Plato exercised a unique influence. It had always been customary to organize eulogy around a set of values approved by the community being addressed (as in the Athenian *epitaphios logos*), but the group of virtues available for such exploitation was shifting and amorphous, both in number and in content, until Plato in Book 4 of the *Republic* established a canon of four excellences (wisdom, justice, courage, and moderation) as necessary for the perfection of the soul and the state. From then on, but especially after they had been adopted by the Stoics as the core of their ethical system, these four virtues were canonized and—to speak only of their role in rhetoric—they formed the basis for the regular school instruction in the oratory of praise and blame. The Roman rhetorical handbooks and the treatises on epideictic by Menander Rhetor and others make the dominance of the Platonic ethical system unmistakable.[17] It came to dominate judicial and deliberative oratory as well as epideictic, and quickly spread to historiography, since the schools of rhetoric provided the only training in the writing of artistic prose available to aspiring historians.

Literary criticism, from Aristotle and Theophrastus onward, owed to Plato certain doctrines so well known as Platonic in origin that it will suffice merely to name them, especially since some have been alluded to in my quotation from Professor Solmsen. In Peripatetic theory, among the virtues of style (*saphēneia*, clarity, *Hellēnismos*, correctness, *paraskeuē*, elaboration, and the *prepon*, appropriateness), the first and last, clarity and

[16] See V. Buchheit, *Untersuchungen zur Theorie des Genos Epideiktikon von Gorgias bis Aristoteles* (Munich 1960) 84–116.

[17] See H. Caplan on the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 3. 2. 3 and 3. 6. 11 for the cardinal virtues in deliberative and epideictic oratory. Consult also D. A. Russell and N. G. Wilson, *Menander Rhetor* (Oxford 1981) 263.

appropriateness, are strongly emphasized by Plato.[18] The comparison of a speech or a poem to a living thing, with a demand for organic unity, derives from the *Phaedrus* (264c). The conception of the poet as irrational, while neither original nor exclusive with Plato, found in his *Ion* and *Phaedrus* the treatment that posterity was destined to remember. Moreover, in the *Phaedrus* Plato carried the notion into new territory when he demonstrated the need both for divine madness and for strict control, derived from the knowledge of dialectic and psychology. Ultimately the *theia mania*, divine madness, of the poet in the *Phaedrus* was transmuted into the theory of *sōphrōn mania* (sane madness), controlled inspiration, which was made to account for such extravagantly admired oratorical qualities as the *deinotēs* of Demosthenes. It contributed also to the concept of *to hypsos*, the sublime, in "Longinus."[19]

Related to the influence of Plato's theoretical advice about the choice and arrangement of words and the structure of a speech, and deserving of close attention (because at certain times it seems to have been much more widely studied than his theoretical principles) is the emergence of Plato himself as a model of style. This is the final topic that I should like to address.

We may begin by returning to Dionysius of Halicarnassus, the Greek historian and rhetorician working in Rome in the time of Augustus, whom I quoted at the outset. In his essay on Demosthenes, part of a series on the Attic orators, he tells us that certain persons (τινες)—probably philosophers, although he does not say so—consider Plato to be *daimoniōtatos*, a supreme genius, accepted as the definitive model (*horos kai kanōn*) for both the plain and the forceful styles (23). Such persons even say that if Zeus spoke Greek, he would sound like Plato. Dionysius maintains that he himself admires Plato's *deinotēs* in the *Dialogues*, especially those in which he preserves the Socratic character (rather surprisingly, he cites the *Philebus*), but he is highly critical of him when he abandons the style proper to the dialogue-form. Most especially he dislikes it when Plato introduces praise and blame into political discussions and tries to convert them into speeches for the prosecution or the defence. When he does so, he becomes different from himself and disgraces the philosophical profession.

This is a revealing comment; it shows Dionysius the rhetor on the defensive. The prominence of speeches in some of the *Dialogues* is precisely what attracted to their study young men interested in becoming orators, especially orator–statesmen in the Ciceronian tradition. Dionysius, who is above all determined to maintain the supremacy of Demosthenes as the model of models, mounts a clever attack on Plato the would-be rhetor.

[18] Clarity, *Phaedrus* 265d; appropriateness, 268d, 274b, and see above, pp. 208–09.

[19] For the steps by which *sōphrōn mania* became equivalent to *theia mania* (with a striking reversal of the implications of *sōphrōn* in the *Phaedrus*), see North, "The Concept of Sophrosyne in Greek Literary Criticism," *CP* 43 (1948) 1–17, esp. 14–16 on Ps.-Lucian and Ps.-Longinus.

First he ridicules him by applying to him the lines addressed by Zeus to Aphrodite in the *Iliad* (5. 428–29), when she flees to him for comfort, after being wounded by Diomedes:

> Not to you, my child, are given the works of war,
> But do you busy yourself with the lovely tasks of marriage.

The analogy tends to remove Plato from serious consideration as a model for the professional speaker. His style is identified with what is soft, charming, incapable of real polemic. Dionysius then proceeds to compare the *Menexenus* with Demosthenes' *On the Crown* (all the while insisting that it is a fair comparison because this is the most effective—*kratistos*—of Plato's *politikoi logoi*). To compress a very long discussion of Plato's faults, let me just say that Dionysius tears to pieces passage after passage of the *Menexenus*, finding in them unnecessary repetition, defective rhythms, excessive ornamentation, youthful indulgence in Gorgianic theatrical tricks, clumsiness, incoherence, even meanness (*tapeinotēs*) and general bad taste—*akairia*, a word that turns up more than once in rhetorical criticism of Plato's rhetoric (24–29).

Dionysius concludes with still another derogatory comparison, this time saying that Plato's style is like a flowery spot affording a traveller a pleasant resting place, while the style of Demosthenes is like a fertile field providing an abundance of the necessities of life, as well as the luxuries that make for pleasure (32). He repeats his charge that Plato's oratory aims only at formal beauty, while that of Demosthenes is useful and practical. (One of the clichés of Greek and Roman criticism is to compare Plato's style to weapons used on parade, Demosthenes' to weapons of war, Plato's to a body accustomed to a life of ease in the shade, Demosthenes' to a body hardened by exercise in the sunlight.)[20]

Yet when he is not attempting to exalt the virtues of Demosthenes, Dionysius is capable of more objective criticism, and he tells us, in the treatise *On Composition*, that Plato excelled in the arrangement of words (though not always in their choice), that he, with Herodotus and Demosthenes, merited praise for variation (*metabolē* 19), and that, like Homer and Sophocles, he used the best kind of *synthesis*, the well-blended (*eukratos*), which constitutes a mean between the austere and the flowery (24), high praise from a Peripatetic critic. Dionysius is not talking about the middle style, in the normal sense of the term as used in Greco-Roman criticism, but rather the middle type of composition or word-placement, yet in fact Plato is almost invariably cited (along with Isocrates) as a model of the middle style, a category that he regularly exemplified in Byzantine criticism.

Especially penetrating are some of the observations of "Longinus," an enthusiastic admirer of Plato. He too compares him with Demosthenes,

[20] See F. Walsdorff, *Die antiken Urteile über Platons Stil* (Bonn 1927) for a variety of critical clichés.

especially in their use of amplification (*auxēsis*), and he likens Plato to a kind of sea (*pelagos*), flooding a vast expanse, steady in his majestic and stately dignity (12). The key words are *onkos* (weightiness) and *megaloprepēs semnotēs* (great-souled dignity). Plato achieves grandeur (*megethos*) in spite of the fact that he flows along with a noiseless current (a phrase borrowed from the *Theaetetus* 144b). "Longinus" uses Plato as the supreme exemplar of how sublimity may be attained through imitation (*mimēsis*). What Plato imitated was Homer. "Plato irrigated his style with 10,000 rivulets from the great Homeric spring," says "Longinus," and concludes with the memorable statement that Plato contended with Homer for the first prize (13. 4).[21]

Imitation was of course the basis of the educational system in Greece and Rome, a circumstance that lent enormous influence to Plato as stylist. However sharply any rival or critic disagreed with the substance of Plato's philosophy, the fact remained that he wrote like an angel (or like Zeus in the ancient commonplace). The desire to understand how he did it and to imitate his virtuosity has obsessed critics, rhetoricians, and even some philosophers from antiquity to modern times. Among the rhetorically oriented critics the most influential in late antiquity was certainly Hermogenes of Tarsus, a contemporary of Marcus Aurelius, whose treatise *Peri Ideōn* (*On Ideas* or *Forms of Style*)[22] left its impress on Byzantine literature and criticism, as well as on writing of the imperial age in Greece. Brought to the West by George of Trebizond in 1426 and translated into Latin by 1538, it exercised a pervasive influence on Latin and vernacular literature of the Renaissance.[23] The very title of this treatise betrays its Platonic inspiration. As George Kustas has said, "... in Hermogenes we are witnessing the decisive step in the process of the Platonization of rhetoric."[24] We might also say that in Hermogenes we witness the culmination of the process of "rhetoricizing" Plato, a process that had long since proclaimed itself in such remarks as that of Dionysius of Halicarnassus about the expectation that Plato should serve as a *kanōn orthoepeias*, a standard of correct diction (*Dem.* 26). By the imperial age the philosopher had become a model of style, and although readers who cared only for style, with no regard for content, must have been in the minority, as De Lacy observes,[25] one or two such readers are on record, including the

[21] Consult D. A. Russell, "*Longinus*" *On the Sublime* (Oxford 1964) esp. xxxix–xl and 109–17.

[22] Translated by C. W. Wooten as *Hermogenes. On Types of Style* (Chapel Hill 1987).

[23] For its influence in the West, consult A. Patterson, *Hermogenes and the Renaissance: Seven Ideas of Style* (Princeton 1970).

[24] *Studies in Byzantine Rhetoric* (Thessaloniki 1973) 163.

[25] P. De Lacy, "Plato and the Intellectual Life of the Second Century A.D." in *Approaches to the Second Sophistic*, ed. G. W. Bowersock (University Park, PA 1974) 7–8.

student of Taurus mentioned by Aulus Gellius, and Fronto, the teacher of Marcus Aurelius.[26]

The judgments pronounced by Hermogenes were to be decisive in defining Plato's stylistic impact in late antiquity and Byzantium. His *Peri Ideōn* identifies seven Forms of style (each of them with several subdivisions) and describes each Form according to eight categories (such as diction, figures, composition, rhythm). Several of the Forms are illustrated by references to Plato. Beauty (*kallos*), Grandeur (*megethos*), Solemnity (*semnotēs*)—a subdivion of *megethos*, Sweetness (*glykytēs*) and Modesty (*epieikeia*)—two subdivisions of Character (*ēthos*)—are regarded as eminently Platonic, and Hermogenes advises his readers to study specific passages in the dialogues in order to recognize and imitate these qualities.[27]

Most revealing among Hermogenes' comments on Plato's style is his repeated assertion that Plato is the supreme model of what he calls panegyric, a term that is now equivalent to the epideictic genre, but has a greatly expanded meaning. Panegyric includes historiography and most other forms of prose-writing (what Plato prophetically called *logographia* in the *Phaedrus*), and even, at one point, includes poetry as well.[28] Hermogenes maintains that Plato's is the most beautiful panegyrical style in prose. In fact, he is to panegyric what Demosthenes is to deliberative and judicial oratory, and what Homer is to poetry.[29]

Menander Rhetor also, in the late third century, author (or supposed author) of influential treatises on epideictic, makes it clear that Plato dominates the genre.[30] This dominance continued into Byzantine times, when the schools were heavily influenced by Neoplatonic commentaries on Hermogenes and other rhetorical writers, as well as on Plato's *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus* themselves, and rhetoric was used, not for its original purposes, but to prepare for the study of philosophy.[31] A remarkable development was the equation of the three types of oratory with the three Platonic faculties of the soul. As reported by the *Prolegomenon* of Marcellinus (late fourth or early fifth century), the highest faculty (the rational) is associated with panegyric.[32] What had been regarded in earlier times as the more important types, the judicial and the deliberative, were linked with the inferior faculties, the spirited and the appetitive. Hence the kind of rhetoric in which Plato was thought to excel corresponded to what, in his organization of the tripartite soul, was undeniably the highest faculty.

[26] Both cited by De Lacy (previous note) 6, 8.
[27] *Peri Ideōn*, ed. Rabe, 297, 246, 247, 386, 387, 243, 244, 337, 348.
[28] Consult Wooten (above, note 22) 138–39.
[29] Rabe (above, note 27) 386–90.
[30] See Russell and Wilson (above, note 17) xxxviii and Index under "Plato."
[31] See G. A. Kennedy, "Late Greek Philosophy and Rhetoric," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 13 (1980) 181–82.
[32] Rabe, *Prolegomenon Sylloge*, 286; consult Kennedy (previous note) 188.

Another source of Hermogenes' influence on later attitudes toward Plato's style lay in the unprecedented flexibility of his critical method. By considering the possible combinations and permutations of the seven Forms and their thirteen sub-Forms, Hermogenes far outstripped such predecessors as Demetrius and Dionysius in the subtlety with which he could analyze and describe the characteristics of any particular author. Thus, as Kustas observes,[33] he came to have a special appeal for Christian thinkers, conscious of the uniqueness of the individual soul. Moreover, some of the Forms that Hermogenes identified were themselves particularly attractive to Christianity. Simplicity (*apheleia*) and Dignity (*semnotēs*) were both considered characteristic of Christian literature. In Hermogenes' system these two Forms were opposed, yet they were both exemplified by Plato, who thus became of interest, not only for what he said, but for how he said it. Furthermore, the quality of grandeur (*megethos*), which ancient critics found in Plato (and of which *semnotēs* is a subdivision for Hermogenes) was thought to include an element that the Neoplatonist Proclus terms the enigmatic and identifies as one source of Plato's vigor (*pathos*). Since for Byzantine criticism obscurity (*asapheia*) is sometimes a virtue of style (when clarity would reveal to the uninitiated what they should not be told), the Platonic example could profitably be studied in this connection too, as the relation of the enigmatic to the obscure was analyzed.[34]

Among other associations between the style of Plato and the special concerns of Byzantine literary culture traced by Kustas, particular importance attaches to the increasing use of moral terminology derived from Plato to describe stylistic distinctions, and the consequent tendency to identify aesthetic with moral standards. The extension of the concepts of propriety (the *prepon*) and appropriateness (*kairos*) in Byzantine literary theory, as a means of giving suitable expression to the divine or cosmic order, and the relation of this development to Plato's *Timaeus* deserve notice.[35]

Long before the Byzantine era, to be sure, the *Timaeus* had been prominent in stylistic criticism, as well as in the study of Plato's thought. "Longinus" cites the famous description of the human body in *Timaeus* 65c–85e as a series of metaphors making for sublimity (while noting also that it is because of such passages that Plato is criticized for his Bacchic frenzy, 32. 7). If we look ahead many years to the renaissance of Byzantine literature in the eleventh century, we learn that Michael Psellus set for himself twin goals: to improve his stylistic eloquence through rhetoric and to purify his spirit through philosophy. "Philosophy without rhetoric has no charm (*charis*), and rhetoric without philosophy has no content (*schēma*)."[36] The model for what he hopes to achieve is the *Timaeus*. In

[33] *Studies* (above, note 24) 17.
[34] Consult Kustas (above, note 24) 12, 39–40.
[35] Kustas (above, note 24) 41–42.
[36] *Chronographia* 6. 107.

this determination to reconcile rhetoric with philosophy and this choice of a model Psellus may serve as our final example of the persistent, benign influence of Plato, *orator summus*.

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